

# What happens when I am anxious?

The next section looks at three ways anxiety can affect people:

- ❖ **Physical** (how the body reacts during anxiety)
- ❖ **Psychological** (the thoughts and emotions of anxiety)
- ❖ **Behavioural** (what people do when they are anxious)

## Physical symptoms of anxiety: changes in your body

We experience physical symptoms of anxiety because of evolution.

Thousands of years ago cavemen and women experienced severe danger from large and scary predators. They were immediately faced with three choices - to take **FLIGHT** and run away, to stay and **FIGHT**, or to **FREEZE** on the spot. Those who responded the quickest were the most likely to survive. They therefore passed this tendency on to their children, with these protective ways of reacting to danger evolving over generations.

Why do these physical symptoms happen?



**Adrenaline** is released into the body when a person notices danger.

Adrenaline is a chemical messenger that prepares the body to **FIGHT**, take **FLIGHT**, or **FREEZE**.

When adrenaline is released, it causes physical changes in the body, which can feel particularly unpleasant.

We do not encounter many predators now, but there are still times when we view something as dangerous and threatening and feel something bad will happen, so adrenaline gets released into the body.

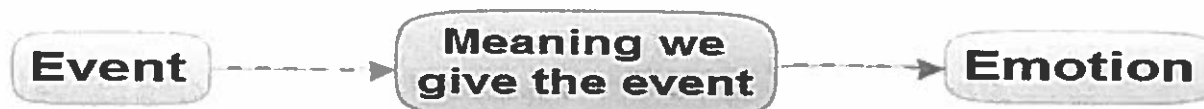
What is different for people is the type of event that is viewed as a threat. This can lead to adrenaline being released into the body even though there is nothing really threatening or dangerous there.

## About Automatic Thoughts






Our thoughts are created by our mind, which is constantly helping us to interpret the world around us, describing what's happening, and trying to make sense of it by helping us interpret events, sights, sounds, smells, feelings. It's just what the human mind does.

Without even realising it, we are interpreting and giving our own meanings to everything happening around us. We might decide that something is pleasant or nasty, good or bad, dangerous or safe.



Because of our previous experiences, our upbringing, our culture, religious beliefs and family values, we may well make very different interpretations and evaluations of situations than someone else. These interpretations and meanings we give events and situations, result in physical and emotional feelings.

Something happens or we notice something, which triggers a thought. Particular types of thoughts tend to lead to particular emotions.

Thoughts	Emotion
I'm in danger and I won't be able to cope with it	Anxiety, Fear 
I'm being treated unfairly and I won't stand for it	Anger, Frustration 
Everything is hopeless – I'm totally worthless, no-one likes me, and nothing can change	Depression 

### Automatic thoughts...

- ❖ Can be words, an image, a memory, a physical sensation, an imagined sound, or based on 'intuition' – a sense of just 'knowing'
- ❖ Believable – we tend to automatically believe our thoughts, usually not stopping to question their validity. When another driver cuts me up, I might judge that he's a selfish thoughtless toad, but in fact, he might be taking his wife to hospital as she's about to give birth. Thoughts are not necessarily true, accurate or helpful. Often based on emotion (rather than facts), which drives our opinion.
- ❖ Are automatic. They just happen, popping into your head and you often won't even notice them.
- ❖ Our thoughts are ours – they can be quite specific to us, perhaps because of our present or past experience, knowledge, values and culture, or just for no good reason at all. Some thoughts are so out of keeping with all those things, and that can make them seem all the more distressing – because we add some meaning about why we had them (I must be a bad person!)
- ❖ Habitual and persistent – our thoughts seem to repeat over and over, and the more they repeat, the more believable they seem, then they set off a whole chain of new related thoughts that lead us to feel worse and worse. They can follow themes, for short periods, or very often, throughout years and decades.

## Psychological symptoms of anxiety: thoughts and emotions

When we feel frightened, stressed, anxious, or threatened then we can also develop psychological symptoms. Psychological symptoms include particular thoughts and emotions.

**Common thoughts and emotions:**

**Scared / Embarrassed / Angry / Panic / Distress /  
Loss of control / Uncertainty / Irritability / Fear**

For example:

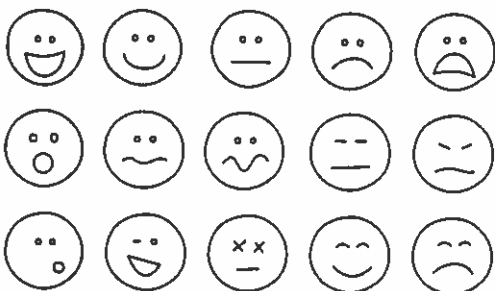
- "I can't cope with this"
- "Why does this keep happening?"
- "I have to get out of here"
- "I should have stayed at home"
- "Why is everyone else ok and not me?"
- "Everyone is staring at me".

People can also have worrying thoughts about the physical symptoms and think something terrible is going to happen.

For example:

- "I'm running out of air"
- "I'm going crazy"
- "I'm going to faint"
- "I'm having a heart attack"

However, although it feels very uncomfortable it is important to remember that the physical symptoms are a normal response to threat and do not mean that anything bad is going to happen



**What psychological symptoms (thoughts and emotions) do you experience when you are anxious?**

# Anxiety Equation

Anxiety =

Perception of threat

(overestimate of the likelihood of an event)

(overestimate of the awfulness of an event)

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Perception of ability to cope / support

(underestimate own ability to cope with the event should it happen)